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Ann Arbor skatepark: keeping the dream alive

Groundcover heard from quite a few readers about the Skatepark opinion piece that we ran in January. We agree that there was insufficient fact-finding and apologize for that. Below is a response we received from Diana L. Kern, Treasurer and Fundraising Chairperson of Friends of the Ann Arbor Skatepark.

Dear Editor:

I am responding to an opinion piece written by Brett Bauder, Groundcover Contributor, in the February 2012, which asked "Will Ann Arbor ever get a skateboard park?" When I read the opinion piece it was clear that the author was sorely misinformed about the current status of the project. I would like to set the record straight.

I am one of ten all-volunteer board members for *Friends of the Ann Arbor Skatepark*. We are the nonprofit formed in late 2009 that has been working for the last two years to raise \$1 million to build a free, concrete, outdoor

skatepark for the citizens of greater Ann Arbor; a park on the same level as Riley Park, the one the author mentioned in his piece. Yes, it really does cost \$1 million for a quality skatepark. I serve as the board's treasurer and fundraising chair. We use the Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation (AAACF) as our fiscal partner. This was done early on to demonstrate our commitment to strong fiscal oversight. Money raised is deposited and held at the skatepark fund at AAACF. This includes money that has been raised for building the park and for the maintenance endowment for the skatepark.

What bothered me about the author's piece was *not* his impatience in having a park, but his accusation that the nonprofit has mishandled or stolen money earmarked for this effort. I find opinion pieces that lack facts to be frustrating; in this case, they could unintentionally hurt the fundraising efforts to make the skatepark dream a reality.

If the author had contacted us before writing the piece, we would have been happy to let him know "where the money is." To date, our nonprofit and

the youth of Ann Arbor have been able to garner grants, individual donations, event proceeds, merchandise proceeds, a Tony Hawk Foundation grant, a Michigan Department of Natural Resources grant, and a matching gift of \$400,000 from the Washtenaw Parks and Recreation Department. This combined total represents over \$800,000 as of this letter. The County will hold and control distribution of the matching funds. The City will hold the Department of Natural Resources grant, which has been awarded but not yet funded. This is an unparalleled task for an all-volunteer group, especially in today's economy! Also, the public/private collaboration of a nonprofit, the City of Ann Arbor, the County Parks and Recreation leadership as well as citizens, foundations and philanthropists is one of the most amazing fundraising efforts I have ever witnessed for the youth of our community. They say "it takes a village" and it sure has. Our community should be proud. Has it taken longer than everyone hoped? For sure! Do we see a light at the end of the tunnel? Yes we do!

We had to raise the majority of money

(80 percent) before we could issue Requests for Proposals (RFPs) – this is happening now. At this point a build and design committee has been activated since January 1, 2012. It is working hard, but the process will take until next year. This includes RFPs, changed memorandums of understanding, requesting bids, review of bids, construction documents, several approvals, building the park, and final inspections. Oh, and yes, we still need to raise about \$175,000. If all the stars align, the skatepark will be available to skate next year – 2013!

If you want to help us complete the skatepark funding effort, join us this year at one of our awesome events, buy a brick for the park, purchase some cool merchandise at ACME Mercantile, or just visit our website, www.a2skatepark.org, and donate online!

Dream It! Build It! Skate It!

Sincerely,

Diana L. Kern
Treasurer and Fundraising Chairperson
Friends of the Ann Arbor Skatepark
www.a2skatepark.org

GROUNDCOVER NEWS MISSION:

Groundcover News exists to create opportunity and a voice for low-income people while taking action to end homelessness and poverty.

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Camp Take Notice launches an online petition

Dear Editor:

In previous articles in Groundcover, readers may have read about Camp Take Notice (CTN), the democratically self-governing tent community of homeless people located on Ann Arbor's

western edge. CTN's democratic self-governance and emphasis on self-help through community living make CTN unique in the Midwest, as does CTN's relationship with MISSION (Michigan Itinerant Shelter System Interdependent Out of Necessity).

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CTN has been forcibly evicted five times in three years, twice from MDOT land. For the past two years, however, CTN has been located at its current MDOT-owned site. Because CTN campers voted to stay at their current location, MISSION works to prevent eviction, unless CTN is first relocated to a better location that is approved by a vote of CTN campers.

To enhance CTN's ability to stay at its current location, MISSION works to ensure good relationships with neighbors, law enforcement, service agencies and others. MISSION also periodically meets with MDOT representatives regarding

CTN. MISSION learned, however, that heads of several state agencies recently met in Lansing to discuss CTN. Because MISSION and CTN were not invited to this Lansing meeting, MISSION and CTN are operating with little information. MDOT's prior evictions of CTN, however, also occurred in the spring.

Your help is needed. To assist in MISSION's advocacy on behalf of CTN, sign our online petition at:

www.ipetitions.com/petition/ctn

MISSION is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, advocating for and assisting CTN. MISSION's governing board, comprised of both homeless CTN campers and housed community members, addresses CTN's needs and coordinates community assistance to CTN. CTN campers, not MISSION, run CTN. MISSION, however, vigorously advocates for CTN and its homeless campers.

To learn more about MISSION, CTN or to work with MISSION, email

[missiona2\(at\)googlegroups.org](mailto:missiona2(at)googlegroups.org)

Sincerely,

Peggy Lynch
MISSION President

Farewell Laurie, and Thank You! Best of luck



by Susan Beckett
Publisher

Laurie Lounsbury, the founding editor of Groundcover, has made an impact that will never be forgotten by those of us who worked with her. She picked up the production side of Groundcover News, put it on her back and carried it to a point of sustainability. She came up with the name *Groundcover*, found the printer, designed the look of the paper, created and updated the website, set editorial policies, laid out the articles, contributed some hysterical humor pieces and did a great deal of editing, too.

Most of these many hours devoted to the paper have been on a volunteer basis. Laurie now needs that time to

build up her freelance business (The Lateral Thinker) and recover from the economic downturn. Those of us who so appreciate her sense of humor are thrilled that she will continue to share some of her writing with us.

Putting out a newspaper is a stressful endeavor, especially in the packed days prior to printing the next issue. Time and again, even with work conflicts adding further pressure, Laurie came through for us, her commitment to our vendors never wavering.

Too often, I neglected to thank her and let her know how much she is valued. It is so easy to take for granted those on whom you lean heavily.

Laurie – and so many others who have been my partners in enormous endeavors like *Groundcover* – please

understand that my failure to communicate my gratitude did not reflect an absence of appreciation. Rather, I integrated your identity with mine, thinking of us as a single organism, united to achieve a specific goal, and thanking you would have felt like thanking myself.



Laurie Lounsbury

You have been the most precious companions in my life. My husband, with whom I've built a life and raised two children, my RESULTS partners with whom I've worked to end the worst aspects of poverty, and the dedicated Groundcover volunteers who have made this enterprise flourish:

please accept this very public and belated *thank you*.

If you see Laurie around, please let her know how much you appreciate her contributions to Groundcover and our community. Keep her in mind for your marketing and website needs.

The torch has passed to our assistant editors who will now be operating as co-editors. Lee Alexander is taking over layout and Andrew Nixon will do even more of the editing and proofreading he performs with such mastery. Please offer them your support.

Change is challenging and uncomfortable, but it is an inevitable precursor to growth. We appreciate you being part of this next stage in our joint adventure and invite you to jump in further.

Snap judgments



by Rev. Dr. Martha Brunell
Pastor, Bethlehem
United Church of Christ

In this era when things are often judged by how quickly they take place, fast, faster, and fastest is highly prized. Many of us have had the experience of purchasing the latest quick technological device, only to have the sinking feeling as we left that parking lot that a newer, faster version would soon be in the stores. Even before these days of superfaster everything, snap judgments were in vogue. We all have a tendency to judge a book by its cover or to form an impression of someone or a situation on the thinnest of information.

One recent Monday morning I was standing in the church office talking with the parish administrator about several topics. I was due to teach a class in a few minutes, and there were a number of things happening in the building that morning. As she and I spoke about a couple of matters of importance, a young man who was doing work for the church that day came up to us. He interrupted our conversation with these words: "I hate to butt into a gossip session..." I was speechless for a second and then furious with the snap judgment he made. Did it have something to do with our age? Was it because we were both female? Was he certain his work and time were more valuable

than ours? Was he that unaware of the number of weighty matters that are regularly discussed within the walls of faith communities? I turned to him and said, "I'm the head of staff in this building and don't engage in much gossip." Apparently, when I then walked to go to class, he said within earshot of others: "Well I guess the church isn't much fun." Someone responded back to him that his comment had been rude.

I have made my share of snap judgments, often inaccurate ones grounded in almost nothing. Those judgments allow us to dismiss people, to make efficient choices, to move on, and on occasion to remain unaffected by something or someone who might shift our understanding or change where we stand.

Tucked into the magic of Groundcover is the opportunity to get beyond fast, uninformed assessments of others who are different from us. This paper is about relationship. It opens door after door into the stories that we are all living and lugging around. Through Groundcover, we are on a first-name basis, and our circle of care enlarges. *Groundcover* gives us cause to pause with fundamental realities around housing. It makes us uncomfortable but also nudges us to grow. And it isn't about gossip; it's about substance.

I hope that the next time I am about to make an unnecessary snap judgment, I remember the young man in the church

office and his ridiculous comment. And I hope when I am at the edge of committing to that quick assessment, that I remember to be grateful for Groundcover and the more nuanced,

interesting, and textured picture it offers us of one another. Thank you for the growing body of expression and experience that binds us together.



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Mass transit and job access in Washtenaw County

by Carolyn Lusch
Groundcover Contributor

For years now there have been plans in the works to expand the current Ann Arbor Transit Authority into a countywide authority. Currently, the system serves mainly the City of Ann Arbor, with routes in Ypsilanti and limited commuter services to Chelsea and Canton. The new system would provide a minimum of dial-a-ride services throughout Washtenaw County, with countywide express services to areas such as Saline, Milan, and Manchester, and potentially more regional connections to places such as Livonia and the airport. Despite intense controversy surrounding funding sources and local autonomy, on March 6 the Ann Arbor City Council approved a partnership with the AATA, the City of Ypsilanti, and Washtenaw County.

Given the focus of Groundcover News, this article examines one specific element of public transit in this county: how it affects job access for those who do not have private transport. Is the current system adequate for transporting people to appropriate employment? Would the countywide system be a significant improvement? What changes, if any, do people who depend on public

transit envision for the system?

The answer to the first question turned out to be a decided "no." While almost everyone I spoke to was supportive of the AATA in general, most were able to offer a different vision of the future.

"Extending bus access out of the city further and extending hours" are the most important changes, according to Peggy Lynch, a board member for Michigan Itinerant Shelter System – Interdependent Out of Necessity (MISSION), a local nonprofit that supports self-governing tent communities.

I went to one such community in Ann Arbor, Camp Take Notice, to discuss what the campers themselves – none of whom own cars and several of

whom either work or take classes – think of the bus system. "Everything I see is positive," said Vince, a local resident who was visiting a friend at the camp for Sunday dinner. Vince acknowledged that it was sometimes difficult to get around late at night, but believes that Night Ride is usually sufficient, especially since the end of January, when it extended its service to Ypsilanti.

Alonso Young, a camper and a student at Washtenaw Community College, agreed that the service hours are inadequate. "They stop running early on Sundays," he noted, which can complicate trips to work or school. Young also cited a time when he was unable to apply for a group home due to his lack of transportation.

Alanna, another camper, echoed this point, observing that "people have shifts after six." But for her, an even greater challenge has been the limited reach of the service. When working at the Taco Bell on Jackson and Zeeb Roads, she had to ride her bicycle because the bus routes did not extend that far west. Riding there every morning was a physical strain and also a risk: the sidewalk was not shoveled in the winter, and the road was slick, narrow, and full of rushing vehicles. After experiencing a bad fall that required a trip to the emergency room, Alanna felt it necessary to leave the job for her safety. "They need to extend at least to Zeeb and Jackson," she concluded.

Traveling in the other direction, from the outskirts into downtown, I encountered a similar mix of approval and suggested changes. According to Brian Durrance, member of MISSION, the jobs available for people in Camp Take Notice are largely to the west of Ann Arbor, as service jobs downtown and on campus are aimed at university students. Nonetheless, retaining and improving central Ann Arbor service has been a major concern for those skeptical of the countywide plan.

For Nancy Shore, director of getDowntown, an organization that provides green commuting programs and services to employees and employers in the Ann Arbor area, the bus service plays a vital role in the local economy. According to Shore, "A lot of employees who work in downtown Ann Arbor don't live in downtown Ann Arbor," largely because of the high cost of rent. These people, however, are important to the functioning of downtown businesses. According to the 2011 getDowntown survey, conducted by CJI Research, 16 percent of employees studied do not have a vehicle available to commute

see BUSES, page 11



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Changing homelessness on the soccer field

by Robert Salo, Groundcover Vendor & Greg Hoffman, Groundcover Social Work Intern

A tournament next month gives folks a chance to see the local homeless soccer team in action. Inspired by the growing popularity of the Homeless World Cup, the Washtenaw County Project Outreach Team (PORT) formed a team in the summer of 2007. This recreation program is specifically designed to provide exercise and socialization opportunities for individuals in Washtenaw County who have experienced or are currently experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity.

The Street Soccer Project Outreach Team (SSPORT) gathers on Thursdays to practice. The team also participates in tournaments both locally and nationally. Guided by its dedicated coaches, the SSPORT soccer program not only has a positive effect on the physical well-being of the participants, it also promotes their mental health. "It's a good way for people to feel good about themselves while they are getting treatment," said program co-founder and coach Sara Silvennoinen.

The SSPORT program has made a measurable impact on the lives of the members of the team. Players develop strong relationships by engaging as members of a team and develop a strong sense of solidarity with each other on and off the field. Team member Ahmad Al-Basir said, "It's a healthy environment for people to get together and do something positive and team-oriented. It helps with both physical and mental health."

Playing soccer provides the players with the opportunity to take their minds off the harsh realities and problems they face in their daily lives, and lets them instead focus



The SSSPORT team and coaches at the end of a tough practice at Wide World of Sports.

on the game. The players are warmly welcoming to new participants and the program is very inclusive, regardless of the players' skill levels. David Altherr, SSSPORT Team veteran who was selected to the 2010 Team USA that participated in the Homeless World Cup in Brazil, said, "We are all on the same team out here."

This environment keeps people engaged and keeps them coming back. "People make a point to get here, regardless of their other situations," said Eastern Michigan Social Work intern Anna Byberg.

Soccer has been an effective outreach tool because it provides an interactive and exciting opportunity that provides therapeutic results for the players. It is a form of mental and physical treatment that doesn't even seem like treatment. "Sara told me about it and I didn't have to think twice. I love it. Soccer has always been a big part of my life," said team member Raul Caraba.

The SSSPORT team practices at the WideWorld Sports Center in Ann Arbor during the winter months and at Wheeler Park and West Park during the rest of the year. Anyone who wishes to play can participate in the local practices, and anyone over the age of 16

who has experienced homelessness in the last year is eligible for the travel team. Coaches Sara Silvennoinen, Linda Bacigalupi, and Jim Bastian coordinate the soccer program with Byberg's help. "It's been rewarding to see how it helps with demeanor, self esteem,

and gives the players a sense of family and community," said Bacigalupi.

The Homeless World Cup Foundation was founded in 2001 by Mel Young and Harald Schmied. The idea to use soccer as an engagement tool for homeless individuals came out of a discussion about the need for a common language that could help create a support network for homeless populations

cross-nationally. Young is also the co-founder of the International Network of Street Newspapers (INSP), a global network of 140 street publications that spans six continents; Groundcover News is a member.

Young and Schmied came up with the idea for the Homeless World Cup at an INSP conference in 2001, with the hope that soccer would serve as the common language that could unite efforts to change homelessness around the world. This is reflected in the Homeless World Cup Federation Mission Statement: *When a homeless person gets involved in football they communicate and build relationships with others; they become teammates, learning to trust and share; they have a responsibility to attend training sessions and games, to be on time and prepared to participate. They feel part of something.*

The first Homeless World Cup was held in Austria in 2003. There are now 73 member nations with national teams. Since 2003, the Homeless World Cup Tournament has been held in Sweden, Scotland, South Africa, Denmark,

see SOCCER, page 11

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Family atmosphere at Salvation Army's Staples Center

by Lee Alexander
Editor

When mother of eight Delores Spratt arrived at the Staples Family Center nearly three years ago, she brought with her a bundle of six children and few other options for housing. Little did she know then that she had found a calling: to reach out to others, particularly mothers, facing similar hardships.

Each year, the Staples Family Center houses more than 200 individuals and families, providing social services, support, laundry facilities and more than 1,200 meals annually. As part of the Washtenaw County Salvation Army, the Staples Center maintains 36 beds for those confronting emergencies.

Before moving to 3660 Packard Rd., Ann Arbor, the Salvation Army operated a smaller facility on Henry St. (called Arbor Haven Shelter). Arbor Haven opened more than 20 years ago, and was the region's first established homeless shelter. The Staples Center moved to its new home and changed its name in 2002.

Chris Levleit is the center's program director. She joined the staff in 2009, her background in social work. "Here we have people come in and they're approved for 30 days," Levleit explained, "then if they need more time to work on their goals, they can ask for an extension beyond, but we are limited to about 90 days here. We really don't have the ability for people to stay much more than that."

Levleit said about two-thirds of the center's residents are families and the remainder are individuals. That makes the Staples Center a little unusual. Other area homeless shelters house either families or individuals, but not



Delores Spratt and agency director Christine Levleit at the Staples Family Center

both. "We're kind of lucky that we can be a little flexible with that," Levleit said. "If I find that there's more need for family space, I can decrease, to some extent, the number of individual beds."

How clients access human services throughout Washtenaw County, and specifically emergency housing, has recently changed. Instead of contacting programs like the Staples Center directly, now all shelter services referrals are filtered through a "single-point of access" – the Washtenaw County Housing Access Line (734-961-1999), run by SOS Community Services.

"The families all come through Family Access and, for the most part, all the individuals mostly come through the Delonis Center now," Levleit said. "An individual might have a screening there and then might get a referral for us. It seems like that has gone pretty well. They're able to call me up and just send somebody over to meet me right away."

"No one comes into the shelter here through us directly, and that's a change. We used to have a wait list. In some ways it was easier to get people in because I could just go down the list. In the past if I was having trouble finding somebody, I'd find somebody who's calling me every day. If they're calling every day, they're really needing to come in."

Delores Pratt was one of those calling every day and really needing to come in. Pratt's husband had lost a comfortable middle-class job with the Detroit School Board in 2003. Unable to regain their footing, the family slowly crept toward homelessness. They reached their tipping point three years ago.

"My husband was laid off," Pratt said. "They came through Detroit and they got rid of certain departments within the board of education. He was one of those who were in that department."

Pratt's husband's unemployment benefits eventually ran out and her part time job wasn't enough to keep them afloat. They watched their savings slowly dissolving. As she put it, "we could just never catch back up."

Today Pratt works full-time at Staples Center and her husband has earned his retirement. The family went from living at a homeless shelter to becoming homeowners in less than three years, a testament to the family's work ethic. Pratt is passionate about the program she describes as her "miracle place."

"My experience is that when I sit down with the intakes," Pratt said, "I can see all the doubt and frustration, and I can easily identify with them. I tell them, 'where you sit, I sat also.'"

"It gives them a picture of my life, to be transparent, because I don't have to share that with them. But I feel people can understand if you've walked in their shoes. It shows you care, because you've been there. You feel everything that they feel."

Pratt said that it's the mothers she can really connect with. It's mothers that take the role of caregiver and it's difficult for them when they are "not the hero." She said that a mother's instinct is to sacrifice for their children, and to see kids struggling with poverty weighs heavily on the women, in particular. "With mothers," she said, "I can reach them."

"I can see the tears that they're holding back just flow," Pratt said. "I try to let them know that the atmosphere here is like family. When you feel that you're part of a family, you feel more comfortable and secure, because family understands. That's one of my biggest things; to keep that atmosphere I had when I was here. As family, we're here for you."

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WE CAN END POVERTY 2015 MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Millennium Development Goals: interventions produce results

by Susan Beckett

Two important achievements in reducing extreme poverty and suffering have been achieved several years ahead of schedule. The world has met the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) target of halving the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and halving those living in extreme poverty. The MDGs are a set of targets adopted by world leaders at the United Nations in 2000 to fight poverty, hunger and disease in poor countries.

Well in advance of the MDG 2015 deadline, over two billion people gained access to improved drinking water sources, such as piped supplies and protected wells, according to UNICEF and the World Health Organization (WHO).

In the March 6 report *Progress on Drinking Water and Sanitation 2012*, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said, "Today we recognize a great achievement for the people of the world. This is one of the first MDG targets to be met. The successful efforts to provide greater access to drinking water are a testament to all who see the MDGs not as a dream, but as a vital tool for improving the lives of millions of the poorest people."

The report, produced by the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Program for Water Supply and Sanitation, states that at the end of 2010, 89 percent of the world's population, or 6.1 billion people, used improved drinking water sources. This is one percent more than the 88 percent MDG target. The report estimates that by 2015, 92 percent of the global population will have access to improved drinking water.

"For children this is especially good news," said UNICEF Executive Director Anthony Lake. "Every day more than 3,000 children die from diarrheal diseases. Achieving this goal will go a long way to saving children's lives."

According to a February 29, 2012 press release from the World Bank, developing countries, as a group, appear to have already met a United Nations goal to halve extreme poverty in the world's poorest countries by 2015, though many countries in sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America are still far short of the goal.

"We are now confident that the developing world as a whole has reached the first of the Millennium Goals and reached that goal in 2010 despite the crisis," said Martin Ravallion, director of the World Bank's research group and leader of the reporting team.



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The following list is our Vendor Code of Conduct, which every vendor reads and signs before receiving a badge and papers. We request that if you discover a vendor violating any tenets of the Code, please contact us and provide as many details as possible. Our paper and our vendors should be positively impacting our County.

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er News vendors, especially vendors who have been suspended or terminated.

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ACROSS

- Norse goddess
- Cattle breed
- Canvas stand
- Nineteenth century author
- Study
- Remove knots
- Insect
- Fanaticism
- Lacking corners
- 1992: A radio network broadcasts an interview with an actor pretending to be this politician running for re-election.
- American satellite
- Sensory organ protector
- African snake
- Typographic measurements
- South American quadruped
- Workroom of a sort
- Rhetorical style
- Ubiquitous American food ingredient
- Take ownership
- Card game
- Indian leader
- Small polymer
- Memphis
- Internet security protocol (abbr.)
- Refuse
- Affirmative
- Become a plaintiff
- Discontinues
- Gimpy
- 1933: A Wisconsin newspaper prints a doctored photo showing this building in ruins, alleging it's the result of explosions caused by "gas generated through many weeks of verbose debate."
- Garlic sauce
- Science of (suffix)
- Mauna
- Get lost!
- Jazz drummer Shelly
- Deco
- Heft
- Piglet
- Notice

DOWN

- Extra
- Of charged particles
- Obtain
- Crimean river
- Most proximate
- dancer, railroad worker

April Fools Classics

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68						69					70	
71						72					73	

- Liquid waste
- Slowpoke
- 1986: A Paris newspaper reports that the Eiffel Tower is to be dismantled, then reconstructed at this location.
- Soon
- Actor Gilliam
- Employer's tax ID (abbr.)
- Preceded
- Garden implement
- Louis, king of France
- Anything
- Angry sound
- Russian satellite
- 1975: An Australian TV news show presents a 10-hour clock, supposedly heralding national conversion to this measurement system.
- Pool necessity
- Actors Cheryl and Alan
- Goodbye

- Frozen dessert
- Center
- "singular sensation"
- Television writer Saks
- For each
- Pasta
- Red, White, or Black
- Actor Wallace
- Molecular components
- Washington city
- Lodge
- Aerospace missile
- Actor Roger
- Make happy
- Eastern European
- Scottish magpie
- Soot
- Glacier
- Cyprus village

Puzzle by Jeff Richmond

Solutions on page 11



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Groundcover News: changing the idea of “work”

by Greg Hoffman,
Groundcover Social Work
Intern

“How are we going to make our livings in a society becoming increasingly jobless because of hi-tech and outsourcing? Where will we get the imagination to recognize that for most of human history the concept of jobs didn’t even exist? Work, as distinguished from Labor, was done to produce needed goods and services, develop skills and artistry, and nurture cooperation.”

- Grace Lee Boggs

I first read this quote from legendary Detroit activist Grace Lee Boggs a few years ago when I was a union organizer. Ms. Boggs’ message resonated with my sentiments toward the working-class struggle and the fight for rights in the workplace. As I look at it now, as a social work intern at Groundcover News, I can still see it through that lens, but there has also been a change in my perspective. Perhaps more paramount than the struggle for rights in the workplace is the struggle to find work in general.

In the United States today, there is still a popular belief that each person controls his or her own economic status. This idea is commonly referred to as the *American Dream*, and is rooted in the stories of self-made industrial pioneers like Andrew Carnegie and Henry Ford. People who still hold this perception believe that anyone can change his or her situation by simply having the motivation to “work hard.” But there is a reason this idea is called the *American Dream* and not the *American Reality*: the truth is that it is not that simple.

As our country has transitioned away from a primarily production economy to a primarily service economy, the job market has continued to tighten and stratify. As little as thirty years ago, a high school diploma was enough for a job applicant to secure a job that would provide a middle class lifestyle. In today’s job market, minimum requirements for employment often include a college degree. According to the US Labor Bureau’s projected statistics for February of 2012, there are more than 3 million Americans with high school diplomas that are currently unemployed. More startling, the same reports project that there are more than 2 million unemployed Americans who have at least a bachelor’s degree. Because of multitudes of job applicants, employers are

able to create increasingly selective and exclusionary policies for hiring new employees, including credit-checks and other measures to disqualify applicants.

Another component to this problem is that a large number of the jobs that do exist in the United States, do not guarantee financial security. Sociologists and economists report that more than ten percent of American households are classified as “working poor,” with the Bureau of Labor Statistics reporting nearly 9 million “working poor” adults. This refers to households in which the total household income is below the poverty line, despite the fact that at least one member of the household is employed full time. The United States has the highest rate of “working poor” households of any of the industrialized nations.

In an economic climate such as this, there is an obvious need for “change,” a term that served as the foundation for the Obama Presidential Campaign in 2008. And although our national outlook is perhaps better now than it was four years ago, there is still a long way to go. To me, Groundcover News stands as a symbol of the type of change that is needed to move forward and is really what attracted me to the organization.

Groundcover News incorporates an innovative approach to provide an income source for individuals who may have fallen through the social welfare safety net. There are no education requirements or credit-checks; all that is needed is the desire to change your situation. It is a re-imagining of the concept of a job, as Ms. Boggs discusses in the quote. And for those who are otherwise excluded from many jobs because of the circumstances or decisions of their past, it is one of the few opportunities to make a change in their employment situation.

But it is more than that. In addition to promoting an individual’s ability to change their economic situation, I’ve come to realize that Groundcover News is able to change the way that people view homelessness. It is obviously not a cure-all approach, but selling Groundcover allows vendors to impact the fear and ignorance that often causes people to just look the other way. I wouldn’t necessarily say that it gives a voice to the homeless population; that implies that they don’t have a voice. What I would say is that it provides a medium to project the voices that are already there but are so often ignored.

Final Writer’s Workshop
Saturday morning, April 21.

Email contact@groundcovernews.com for location and registration information, or call 734-972-0926.

Trivia passion spawns a business

by Susan Beckett

An avid fan of popular sitcom *How I Met Your Mother* and trivia games, Ricardo Rodriguez wanted to test his trivia knowledge of the show. He found abundant footage of the show on YouTube, which he would halt at a certain point and pose questions about what comes next. Inspired by the enthusiastic response of his friends to the prototype Rodriguez developed last year with two other computer science graduate students, they brought in a student from the school of information, formed a company, and expanded the concept to a general purpose trivia development platform called YouTrivia, which went live last month.

Businesses use this platform to engage and learn about potential customers through casual games. Teachers develop games that reinforce curriculum. The software includes analytics that can be used to target

the questions and content to the users’ background knowledge and interests and collect pertinent information.

Working out of TechArb, the business incubator for University of Michigan students, the YouTrivia team sought advice on bringing the product to market. They requested an evaluation from local intelligent robotics company, SoarTech, whose staff presents at a U-M game theory class. Based on feedback from Mike Van Lent at SoarTech and mentor Jane Delancey, whom they met at the Great Lakes Entrepreneurship Competition, the YouTrivia team incorporated game theory into their product and targeted the tourist industry and university marketing departments as their initial customers.

Visit YouTrivia.com to test your own knowledge of popular television shows, Michigan football, song lyrics, and places around the world. You can also make your own trivia game.

Racism changes come “dropping slow”

by Karen L. Totten
Groundcover Contributor

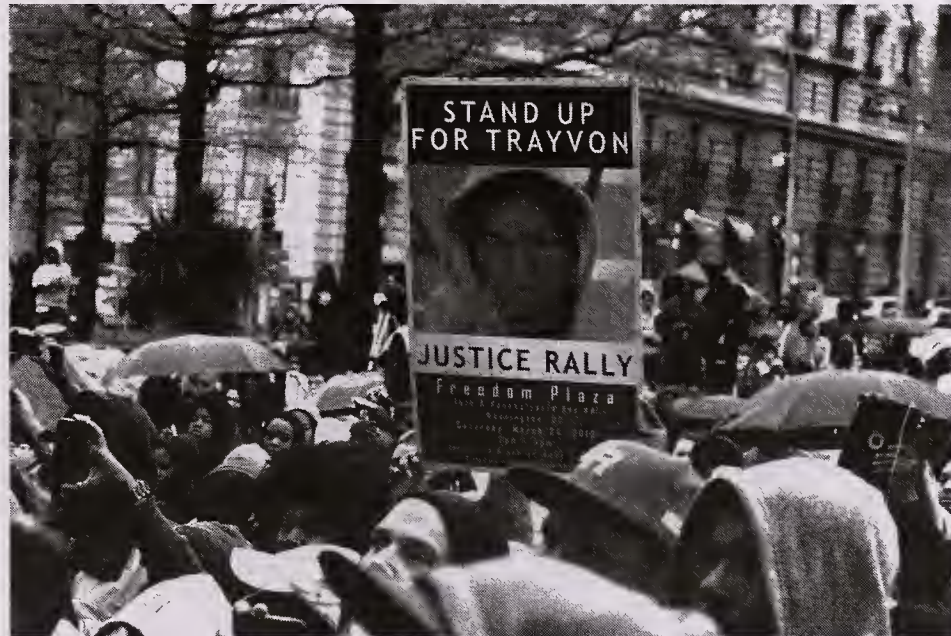
Julian lived with two of my friends and me one summer semester in the mid-70s while his girlfriend Donna worked at a children's camp. He paid her share of the rent and did her share of chores during the week; on the weekends our quartet became a quintet. Julian grew up in a small town near the Michigan-Indiana border. He and Donna had met on campus—just how I was not privy to—I only knew that he was smart and funny and easy to be around.

Roommate Gail said the cross that burned in our backyard was put there by someone we all knew. I had a hard time accepting that—could we really have a friend who was filled with that much hate and anger yet hide it so well to our faces? I only heard rumors about the Klan when I was growing up; my

Grandfather said once that some of his customers were Klansmen. I was shocked. They paid for their gas and oil with cash like everyone else, he said, so he didn't turn them away. I did not understand this way of business. It seemed to turn a blind eye to the pain caused by this gang.

The cross-burning did not threaten my roommates and myself into maintaining one bigot's view of the status quo.

Julian came to my parents' house once, for a pool party. A veneer of pleasantries wrapped around the interactions that night. When we left for the drive back to campus, I could see Julian was upset and he joked in a half sad, half sarcastic way about a feeling he perceived that some of the guests at the party envisioned him dressed in livery pants and cropped jacket to be placed out by the lamppost at the end of the driveway. I hadn't noticed his discomfort, immediately guilty that I had put him in this position. It took some time to convince him I didn't think that way myself.



The shooting death of a Florida teenager in February again shines a spotlight on the uncomfortable issue of race in America. Photo by Rick Reinhard.

The cross looked small and ugly, about three feet in height, planted quite close to the bedroom window of one of the women who lived downstairs. The grass lay scorched and achy grey. I stared at the burned wood in disgust. Fortunately, it had not ignited the wooden house siding. Julian did not appear scared by this incident, but rather as if he suspected something like this might happen.

I recalled classmates in high school who bragged at lunch of skipping school to drive to the city to taunt black people on the streets. I remembered an old boyfriend I left because I could not condone his support of George Wallace for president. I thought of the late 60s and the days of the riots when my father, alone at the family business late at night was forced to sell bullets to a group of drunk white men who came in off the highway looking for trouble. He stopped selling shells after that incident.

The cross-burning did not threaten my roommates and myself into maintaining one bigot's view of the status quo. Julian continued to live at our house and he and Donna remained romantic. Still, the fear of further acts of violence left its shadow on our everyday lives. As the years have passed I have lost contact with these college friends, but I hope they are safe and well.

I think of them now, especially, because of the negative attitudes so freely displayed toward President Obama, his family, his right to govern the United States. Some opponents of his deride him as “uppity” or “other.” Offensive epithets are used to describe him, his wife and children. Presidential candidates exploit these racist feelings calling President Obama names, casting aspersions on his motives, and generally

treating him with disrespect. It is one thing to disagree with the President on political grounds, and quite another to subject him to racist slurs. Sometimes, I wonder if certain people hate Obama even more because he is half-white.

Can people overcome their prejudices? I'd like to think so, but I have to say that most of the people in my life have become more entrenched in their beliefs as they have aged, with the majority becoming more prejudiced. My younger son likes to play Janis Ian's song “Society's Child” on YouTube. The attitudes revealed about an interracial couple in this song, which was a hit in 1967 despite being suppressed in some radio markets, are a puzzle to him. His context for understanding is vastly different than mine, as he was not witness to the struggles of the Civil Rights movement and he does not associate in circles where segregation and racism are acceptable.

And perhaps his incomprehension is a sign of change. Change, like peace, said W.B. Yeats, ordinarily comes “dropping slow.” But if my son cannot conceive of racist behavior, perhaps a generational shift has already occurred, moving us toward more positive definitions of human dignity and worth. I only know that I never expected that in 2012, “the glorious future” of my youth, that we would be subject to such demonstrations of bigotry as those currently displayed by the spluttering pundits in certain quarters and their political henchmen. The white majority is soon to be a thing of the past. Perhaps we are witnessing the last tortured gasp of those who want to blame someone for their impending loss of power.


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Buses and mass transit in Washtenaw County

continued from page 4

downtown, and of those, 48 percent take the bus at least part-way to work. "A lot of employers do think that having [public] transportation is important to attracting employees," Shore said.

Mike Morgan, manager at Potbelly Sandwich Works on State Street, confirmed this. Almost all his employees, both students and locals, rely on public transit. He would be interested in seeing a countywide

plan implemented, especially one that would access the northwest corner of Ann Arbor. Still, he believes in the importance of the current system and services like the Go!Pass, through which downtown employers can purchase inexpensive unlimited bus passes for their employees. "It's essential for my employees to be able to commute to and from work while saving money on parking and fuel," Morgan said.

Many hurdles remain for the countywide transit plan. Voters must approve funding for the authority, and municipalities may opt out at any time. Still, this is part of a growing trend toward regional public transportation echoed across the country, including other parts of Michigan.

For Shore, there are clear reasons why public transportation has become such a popular option. Public transit

"actually contributes to a more vibrant economy," Shore observed, by freeing up parking and roads for visitors to the city, as well as allowing residents to save money on gas. She also sees it as a powerful way of "getting to know your community" by forming personal connections with other patrons and sharing a common experience. "It's where the world is moving."

Local soccer club dreams big

continued from page 5

Australia, Italy, Brazil, and France. The 2012 tournament is scheduled to take place in Mexico City. The Homeless World Cup Foundation reports that playing organized soccer has helped more than 70 percent of the players to establish secure housing, beat substance addictions, and find stable employment.

Street Soccer USA is the national program that oversees teams in 16 cities across the United States, including the SSSPORT team in Ann Arbor. The Street Soccer USA Cup is held annually,

with the 2012 venue set in New York City. Eight men and eight women are selected from the field of competitors at the USA Cup to participate on Team USA. The Homeless World Cup Foundation does national team rankings each year and Team USA currently is ranked number 21 in the world.

The SSSPORT program has helped reduce homelessness among participants from 57 percent down to 17 percent. There has also been a 35

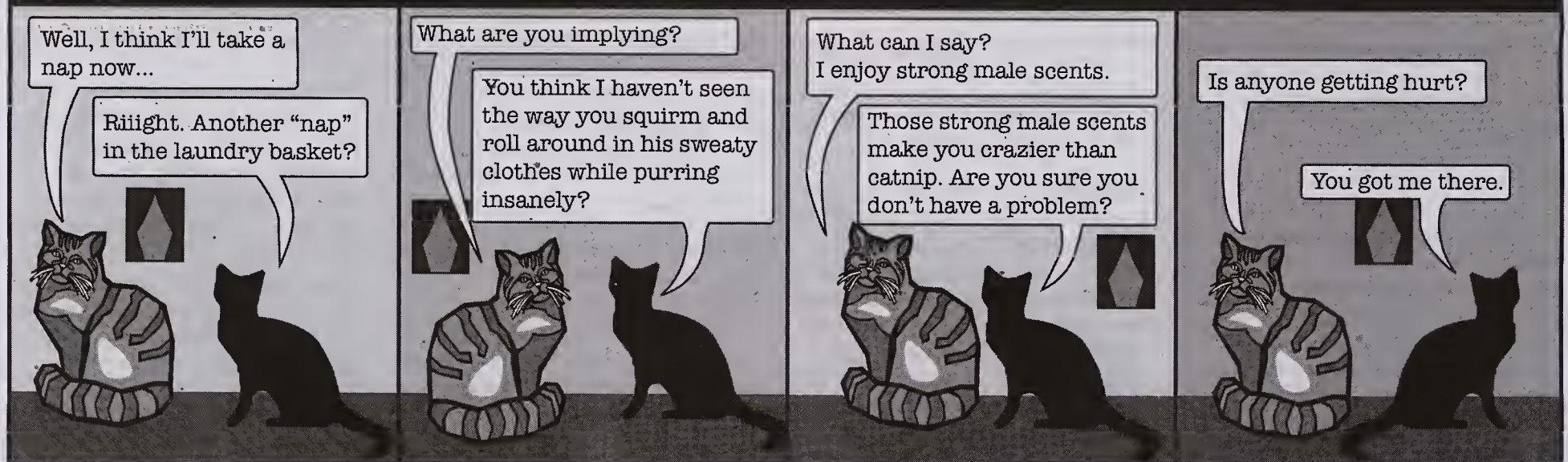
percent increase in employment among the participants, along with a 15 percent increase in involvement in substance abuse treatment programs and an 18 percent increase in involvement in mental health treatment programs.

The SSSPORT team is currently preparing for the Kevin Polk Midwest Memorial Tournament, which will be held at the WideWorld Sports Center on May 12 at 12 p.m. This year's event is co-sponsored by the Washtenaw County Sheriff's Department. The sustainability of the program depends

exclusively on donor support. All funds raised support the SSSPORT program and will be used for equipment, uniforms, and costs for travel to the USA Homeless Cup in New York in June. The tournament is named after Kevin Polk, a street soccer player from Fort Worth, Texas who passed away this year.

More information about the tournament will be available at www.ewashtenaw.org/government/departments/port/street_soccer

Strange (but Mostly True) Stories About a Mother and her Daughter • Cy Kloné © 2012



Cryptoquote Solution

"There are weapons that are simply thoughts. For the record, prejudices can kill and suspicion can destroy."

- Rod Serling

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People connecting and creating friendships through the rotating shelter

by Shoshana Mandel

It has been nearly 20 years since a few churches began providing a place to sleep during the cold weather months, yet the Rotating Shelter is still unknown to many in the community.

Traditionally, these congregations have provided evening and morning transportation, a space to sleep and bathrooms, outdoor space for those who smoke, volunteers who spend the night, snacks, supervision, and even sometimes entertainment. But the single most valued and talked about commodity this year was warmth of spirit and caring connections that volunteers made with their guests. Great food was a strong contender.

Laura Girbach, a Zion Lutheran Church Rotating Shelter volunteer for almost 20 years, explained why she continues doing this. "Helping keeps me aware and gets me outside of my comfort zone," Girbach said. "Most of us are only one or two pay checks away from this situation."

Surprising connections can happen. As she described, "One young volunteer had been really nervous until she sat down with a guest for a meal, and found out how much they had in common... earlier that evening she had been milling around in the kitchen not interacting with anyone."

Reflecting on what stood out for them in their experiences this year, some of the guests cited those congregations whose volunteers made the effort to talk with them, making them feel welcome. They discussed some of the special things that happened such as receiving books in Spanish, a job offer, free haircuts, socks, overflowing bags of toiletries, pizza and movie nights, breakfast with a late wake-up, hot soups, and amazing desserts.

What is really special about this program is that it raises awareness and provides opportunities for people to connect with people they might not ordinarily meet. Jane Hayes, a coordinator at First Presbyterian Church of Ann Arbor talked about the role of hospitality.

"It is much more than giving a roof for the night," Hayes said. "It means smiles, sharing stories, asking what you can do to make them more comfortable. It is not enough to just do shelter; go a few more steps and treat them with respect. I was amazed at how I could relate to many of the guests whose lives were similar to mine until a job loss set a downward spiral in motion."

The Religious Coalition for the Homeless assumed financial responsibility for aspects of the Rotating Shelter this year due to financial constraints at the Shelter Association of Washtenaw County (SAWC). Ron Gregg, who spearheaded the fundraising efforts and is one of the leaders of the Coalition, says that the Coalition was formed due to a realization that together, the religious groups could do more than any one congregation could do alone. He was surprised how quickly things came together last summer when the churches were approached for funds and a majority contributed.

The coalition hired me and a co-worker to replace the shelter social worker who had previously worked with the Rotating Shelter. Each night one of us checked the men in and screened them for alcohol use, transferred them to the congregation-supplied transportation and then followed them to the site, remaining with them until lights-out at 10 p.m. We handled any problems, oriented the volunteers, kept the shelter informed, and were on-call through the night in case emergencies occurred.

We mediated conflicts due to disruptions or someone taking more than their fair share of something. Difficult tasks involved removing someone due to problematic behavior or substance use. Sometimes volunteers asked how to talk to the guests. At



Shelter volunteers Steve Ennis and Tim Schenk load up the truck to move bedding to the next house of worship

the same time some of the guests speculated why volunteers did not talk with them. However, over the course of each week, we watched friendships grow where earlier skepticism or mistrust existed.

We learned that both groups are comprised of parents, grandparents, veterans, and students, working people, people in recovery, people out of work, retirees, and people with problems, someone's child, friend, neighbor, confidante, readers, writers, thinkers, introverts and extroverts.

One guest told me that I was acting like I "looked down on them." I was shocked at first and did not know how to respond. It was only much later that I knew he was justified in his feelings and partially correct. Here I was, standing over the guests each night. I was shepherding them into the cars, or handing out blankets or pillows. I was reminding them of how to behave, asking someone to turn down their music or leave the rotation because they were intoxicated.

What they did not know was that I cherished these exchanges, thought about them long after I left for the evening. Despite being a social worker for more than 20 years, this experience

was impacting me in a way I had never been impacted before.

The Rotating Shelter's 23 host congregations solicit volunteers from within their own membership to provide as many as 100 volunteers for the week or two that the men (there are no women for now) reside with them. The volunteers are diverse in age and backgrounds. There are energetic youth starting conversations effortlessly, playing a game of cards, or sharing a card trick or a joke. At the other end of the spectrum, there are the leaders of the volunteers who did the planning, offered blessings before a meal, explained the special treats for the week, compiled spread sheets, filled volunteer slots, bought food, planned menus, and organized drivers.

Dan McConnell volunteered every week and procured a rental truck paid for by the coalition. With the help of several of the guests and coalition volunteers, he retrieved bedding, exchanged dirty linens for clean, and delivered them all to the next site.

The rotating shelter embodied collaboration at every level this year. The relationships forged in the process made us all stronger.

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